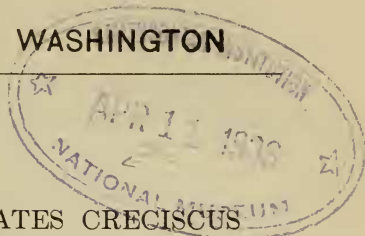


PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON



LATERALLUS GRAY ANTEDATES CRECISCUS
CABANIS.

BY JAMES L. PETERS.

In the last part of volume 4 of the *Journal für Ornithologie* Jean Cabanis proposed the genus *Creciscus* with *Rallus jamaicensis* Gmelin as its monotypic type. His new genus did not find universal favor among the ornithologists of his day; apparently it was considered too close to *Porzana* to merit recognition. However, when R. Bowdler Sharpe wrote up the Rallidae for the twenty-third volume of the *Catalogue of Birds* in the British Museum in 1894, he revived Cabanis' name of *Creciscus* for a group of twelve species of rails found in North, Central and South America and the Galápagos Archipelago. Sharpe's generic synonymy (omitting names proposed by Heine in 1890 on grounds of purism) is:

Creciscus Cabanis J. f. O. p. 428 (1856) Type *C. jamaicensis*.
Rufirallus Bp. C. R. xliii, p. 599 (1856) Type *C. cayennensis*.
Laterirallus Bp. C. R. xliii, p. 599 (1856) Type *C. melanophaeus*.

Sharpe himself was opposed to Bonaparte's names arbitrarily compounded with no regard for either euphemy or classical usage, so it is easy to see why he should have selected Cabanis' *Creciscus* from among the three names all ostensibly published in 1856. Anyway, *Creciscus* came into general use from 1894 onwards and after that it was so much easier to copy Sharpe than to go back of 1894 and ferret out the facts.

It now appears that *Creciscus* was not published in 1856, but in 1857. In the early days of the J. f. O. the parts were numbered consecutively from Jahrgang to Jahrgang, no. 24, which included pp. 417-506, being the last part of the volume for 1856. It was supposed to have appeared in November, but

a published letter from a correspondent, dated 16 Feb. 1857, shows that part 24 must have made its appearance some time after that date.

This would seem to dispose of *Creciscus* and open up the way for the employment of either *Rufirallus* or *Laterirallus*, since the weekly parts of the *Comptes Rendues* in which those names were published appeared on schedule so far as known. There is, however, a still earlier name, *Laterallus* G. R. Gray. The history of this name is as follows. Bonaparte published one of his numerous "Conspecti" in *Ann. Sci. Nat., Zool.*, ser 6, 1, 1854, p. 105-152. On p. 150 he lists the genera of Rallidae and under genus 2012 *Hypotaenidia* Reich. he proposes subgenus d, *Laterallus* Bp. This name is an absolute nomen nudum at this appearance, having no included species and no diagnosis, but was validated by G. R. Gray, *Cat. Gen. and Subgen. Bds.* 1855, p. 120, who, though he credited the name to "Pr. B.", designated *Rallus melanophaia* Vieillot as the type of the genus. *Laterallus* appears to have been lost sight of, though it is listed as of Bonaparte 1854 in Waterhouse *Index Generum Avium* 1889 and Richmond mentions it in his third "List of Generic Terms of Birds," 1917, p. 571.

Just how Gray discovered what species Bonaparte intended to include in his genus is not clear but he must have had some inkling through Bonaparte himself, for in the *Compt. Rend.* 43, 1856, p. 599, Bonaparte lists the species under the genera *Rufirallus* and *Laterirallus* (*sic*), the latter no doubt an emendation of *Laterallus*, and there the first species under *Laterirallus* is *Gallinula albifrons* Swainson, which is a synonym of *Rallus melanophaeus* Vieillot.

As long as *Rallus jamaicensis* Gmelin and *Rallus melanophaeus* Vieillot are kept in the same genus, the proper generic name for the group is *Laterallus* Gray.

In concluding I would add that Rails as a whole present a problem to any one with a tendency to lump genera. An ancient and widely distributed group, each species shows certain external structural characters that seem to be of more than specific value, yet if these characters are to be considered of generic worth we are faced with a multiplicity of monotypic genera that will completely obscure the close relationships that appear to exist between a great many species.